



Frederick Engels, 1841

## Engels and the Labour Movements

The [Marxists Internet Library's Encyclopedia](#)'s entry on *Rheinische Zeitung* starts thus:

"The *Rheinische Zeitung für Politik, Handel und Gewerbe* was founded on January 1, 1842. It was, generally, a pro-democracy [reformist](#) publication of the Rhine's bourgeois opposition to Prussian absolutism. [Dr] Karl Marx wrote his first news article for it on May 5 1842 [his 24<sup>th</sup> birthday]. By October 1842, he was named editor.

"On November 16 1842, *en route* to England, Engels paid a visit to the *Rheinische Zeitung* offices – where he first met the new editor. Engels' time in England would result in a series of articles for the RZ – and those would, in turn, lead to his famous book, [The Condition of the Working Class in England](#)."

The *Rheinische Zeitung* was Karl Marx's first, and probably his only ever regular employer, but the record shows that Frederick Engels had an article published in the *Rheinische Zeitung* even before Marx arrived there. Therefore they must have known each others' writing even before they met in 1842.

The two teamed up for good in Paris, in August 1844, by which time Marx was already in exile from his native Germany. The question in this first part of our "Classics" course remains: When did these two become "Marxists"? And the answer is that the crucial transition took place through their joint writing of "[The German Ideology](#)", from 1845 onwards.

A related question could be: What did each of them separately bring to "Marxism"? The text today can serve to show that Frederick Engels brought with him a strong sense of the historical destiny of the working class. It is the chapter on "Labour Movements" from Engels' "The Condition of the Working Class in England" (attached; download linked below).

It seems that by 1844 when they re-met in Paris, these two young men, Engels at 24 and Marx at 26 years old, had both already formed the unusual opinion that the working class was destined to be the gravedigger of the capitalist bourgeoisie.

For all of the historical materialism, and the later discovery of the Marx's theory of surplus value, yet without a candidate for the role of free-willing revolutionary agent and Subject of

History there was never going to be a communist movement. Marx and Engels agreed that the communist revolutionary Subject was bound to be the working proletariat, and they never subsequently wavered from that view.

Engels' research into the working class in (at the time) its most advanced condition in the world was quite crucial for both of their ability to take the partisan view in favour of the working class that they did take. It gave them the empirical, abstract factual knowledge that allowed them to concretise their revolutionary project with confidence. Hence this book of Engels', his first, is certainly a classic. As he put it in our attached and downloadable chapter:

*"These strikes... are the strongest proof that the decisive battle between bourgeoisie and proletariat is approaching. They are the military school of the working-men in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided..."*

It is a classic in at least two other ways. It is a classic example of the well-organised marshalling and synthesis of library research, interview research and personal observation. It is also a classic of urban social theory or urbanism, of which it is the pioneering text.

**Image:** Frederick Engels in his military year, 1841.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Condition of the Working Class in England, Labour Movements, 1845, Engels.](#)
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